

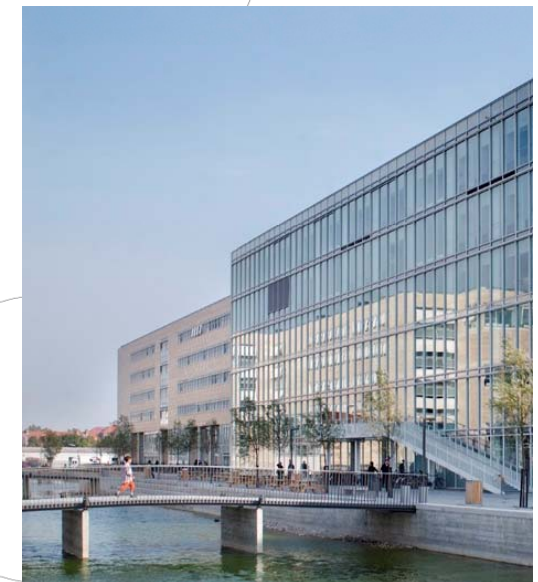


On the origins of the Elfdalian nasal vowels from the perspective of diachronic dialectology and Germanic etymology

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1. Introduction

Elfdalian (autonym *Övdalsk* or *Dalska*, Sw. *Älvdalska*) is a variety of Dalecarlian spoken by some 3,000 to 5,000 inhabitants of the former parish of Övdaln in the Upper Siljan Region, Upper Dalarna, Sweden (Sapir 2005).

According to Dahl (2005), the distance between Swedish and the Upper Siljan vernaculars, to which Elfdalian belongs, is comparable to the one between Swedish and Icelandic or Faroese, and is much greater than the distance between Swedish, Danish and Norwegian.



1. Introduction

Quantifying linguistic distance

Elfdalian in many aspects classifies as a separate language rather than a Swedish dialect. It shows striking archaisms as well as innovations both on the phonological, the morphological and the lexical level (Dahl 2005; Sapir 2005).

Innovation/archaism	Icel.	Elfd.	Sw.
Retention of Old Norse short syllables	no	yes	no
Retention of the ON fricatives <i>ð</i> and <i>ǰ</i>	yes	yes	no
Retention of the ON dative case	yes	yes	no
Diphthongization of ON <i>*ī</i> (> ai)	no	yes	no
Central Scandinavian vowel harmony	no	yes	no

For some lexical idiosyncracies, cf. the archaism *rakke* ‘dog’ (ON, Icel. *rakki*) and the innovation *brinde* ‘elk’ (derived from Elfd., Nw. dial. *brunda* ‘to be in heat’ (cf. Nw. dial. *brund* ‘1. rut, 2. male elk’).



2. The nasal vowels of Elfdalian

1. Short stressed vowels

Vowel nasalization is partly allophonic and partly phonemic in Elfdalian. It seems allophonic on stressed short vowels, which are automatically nasalized before nasals.

Plain vowels		Nasal vowels	
orthography	IPA	orthography	IPA
kripp 'kid'	[kɾɪp:]	imil 'sky'	[ĩmɪl]
eri 'hare'	[ɛrɪ]	enne 'forehead'	[ẽn:ɛ]
laks 'salmon'	[lɛks]	kamb 'comb'	[kẽmb]
kulla 'girl'	[kʉl:ɐ]	kumå 'come'	[kũmɔ]
byddja 'dwell'	[byɖʒ:ɐ]	lyngn 'mild'	[lĩŋ:ẽn]
röv 'fox'	[rœv]	sömt 'sown'	[sœ̃mt]
båká 'fry'	[bɔkɔ]	gåmål 'old'	[gõmɔl]



2. The nasal vowels of Elfdalian

2. Short unstressed, word-final vowels

On unstressed vowels, nasalization is phonemic: it cannot be predicted on the basis of the phonetic context. The morphological functional load is high; in many cases, nasalization of the final syllable gives rise to definite forms of nouns, thus creating a minimal pair.

Plain vowels		Nasal vowels	
orthography	IPA	orthography	IPA
neti 'net' (dat.)	[nɛ̃tɪ]	netj 'id.' (dat.def.)	[nɛ̃tĩ]
enne 'forehead'	[ɛ̃n:ɛ]	enneɳ 'id.' (pl.def.)	[ɛ̃n:ẽ]
kulla 'girl'	[kʌl:ɐ]	kullə 'id.' (def.)	[kʌl:ẽ]
kullu 'girl' (acc.)	[kʌl:ʌ]	kullɥ 'id.' (acc.def.)	[kʌl:ũ]
djävä 'give'	[dʒæʊɔ]	attå 'back, again'	[ɛt:õ]



2. The nasal vowels of Elfdalian

3. Long vowels

On long vowels and diphthongs, nasalization is both allophonic and phonemic. The vowels are automatically nasalized before (and often also after) nasals, but in other cases, the nasalization is purely lexical.

Plain vowels		Nasal vowels	
orthography	IPA	orthography	IPA
dal 'valley'	[dɛ:r]	mą 'cow'	[mẽ:]
wið 'wood'	[wɪ:ð]	wjster 'left'	[wĩ:ster]
blåsa 'blow'	[blɔ:sɐ]	lås 'lock'	[lõ:s]
ais 'ice'	[ei:s]	daj 'yours'	[dẽĩ:]
rieða 'arrange'	[rieðɐ]	rjesa 'travel'	[rĩẽsɐ]
liuos 'light'	[ljuo:s]	sniyo 'snow'	[snjũõ:]



3. Sample of spoken Ełfdalian



Nativity of Jesus in Ełfdalian, read by Lena Willemark, transcribed by Piotr Garbacz.

1. On tiðę kam eđ iett buođ frą tjäyseram Augustus at iel wärdę uld skattskrievas.
2. Ittađ war fuost skattskrievnindseę og on add dier mes Kwirinius war an so war öspin i Syrien.
3. Dą fuor oller umstađ og ulld lat skattskriev sig, wer og ienn daiti senn stađ.
4. So gard Juoseff og, og etesros an war undo diem so ärd Daviđ til, fuor an frą Nasaret i Galileen upi Judeen og upi Daviðes stad, Bettleiem og
5. ulld lat skattskriev sig i lag min Maria. Dier war festfuok og ą war ą sytn.
6. Etersos ą war rieđ i rą, wart eđ so ą ulld få krippin me dier war dar.
7. O fikk ien sun og eđ war fuost krippin. ą lindeđ an og laggd an i ien krubbu, etersos int eđ fanns nođ inwärn ađ diem noęer eller.
8. Dar i markum war eđ geslkaller aut og ęogäs fläđ um notę
9. Dą stuođ eđ Ärrames aindsel fromonađ diem, og eđ stjen ringgum diem, og liuoseđ kam frą Ärram, og dier wart grąll autstellder.
10. Men aindjeln saggd ađ diem: Wariđ it skerner! Ig kum min buođ at uliđ war sturfaingner, ollt fuok ul werd glađir.
11. I dag ar ien frelser kumiđ til ađ iđ i stađim Daviđ, og an ir Messias, Ärrn.



4. The dialectal positioning of Elfdalian

1. The fate of the diphthongs

The Old Norse diphthongs *ei, *au and *ey were monophthongized to \bar{e} and \bar{o} in central East Nordic, i.e. Danish, Swedish and East Norwegian, but not in the West Norwegian and Finland Swedish dialects.

Swedish	Elfdalian	Nynorsk	Old Norse	PGm.
sten	stien	stein	steinn	*staina-
röd	rođ	raud	rauđr	*rauda-
ö	ä	øy	ey	*aujō-

Elfdalian takes up a middle position: *-ie-* did developed from OEN * \bar{e} through secondary diphthongization, and *-ä-* probably from \bar{o} < *ey through unrounding. However, *au never merged with the monophthongization product of ON ey as in the other Scandinavian languages, and remained distinct as *-o-*.



4. The dialectal positioning of Elfdalian

2. Nasal assimilation by following voiceless stops

Nasal assimilation was a Proto-Norse development that left traces in all the Nordic languages. Its incidence is much stronger in the West Norse than in the East Norse dialects, however, and Elfdalian roughly seems to conform to the former group.

Swedish	Elfdalian	Nynorsk	Old Norse	PGm.
backe	bokke	bakke	bakki	*bankan-
dricka	drikka	drikke	drekka	*drinkan-
länk	lekk	lekk	hlekk	*hlanki-
sjunka	sikka	søkke	søkkva	*sinkwan-
svamp	sopp	sopp	sopp	*swampu-
vinter	witter	vetter	vetr	*wintru-
änka	aintja	ekkje	ekkja	*ainakjōn-



4. The dialectal positioning of Elfdalian

3. R-mutation

In West Norse, R-mutation caused vowels in front of R (< PGm. *z), to be raised in the same way as by i-mutation. Elfdalian again takes a middle position between East and West.

Swedish	Elfdalian	Nynorsk	Old Norse	PGm.
bar	ber	ber	berr	*baza-
djur	diuor	dyr	dýr	*deuza-
hare	eri	hare	heri	*hazan-
kar	kar	kjer	ker	*kaza-
ko	tjyr	ku	kýr	*kū-z/*kō-z
lår	lår	lår	lær	*lahaza-
öra	ära	øyre	eyra	*auzōn-



4. The dialectal positioning of Elfdalian

4. The West Norse shift from falling to rising diphthongs

Another typically West Norse innovation is the shift of falling to rising diphthongs. By this change Old Norse *-éa- or *-ía- developed into *-já-. Elfdalian offers proof of this change, and thus seems to qualify as a West Norse dialect.

Swedish	Elfdalian	Nynorsk	Old Norse	PGm.
lie	ljå	ljå	léa > ljá	*lewan-
dial. rie	-	rjå	-	*rīhan-
se	sjå	sjå	séa > sjá	*sehwan-
(tre)	trjår (f.)	(tre)	þrjár (f.)	*þrīōz

Note that Elfd. *trjår* instead of "expected" **trjár* can be explained by R-mutation (see 4.3).



4. The dialectal positioning of Elfdalian

5. w-breaking or w-coloring?

In East Norse, *-i-* was broken into *-iu-* in front of labialized velars. Elfdalian does not take part in this change, which would make it West Norse. However, West Norse regularly has w-coloring of *-i-* to *-y-*, while Elfdalian simply retained the original vowel quality. This conservatism is only shared by Old Gutnish (e.g *singa*, *sinka*).

Swedish	Elfdalian	Nynorsk	Old Norse	PGm.
bjugg	begg	bygg	bygg	*bewwu-
ljung	ling	lyng	lyng	*lingwa-
sjunga	singga	syngje	syngva	*singwan-
sjunka	sikka	søkke	søkkva	*sinkwan-
(sticka)	stikka	støkke	støkkva	*stinkwan-



5. Origins of the Elfdalian nasal vowels

1. Synchronic nasalization

The automatic nasalization of both short and long vowels in Elfdalian seems to be recent, as it is still productive, cf. the loanwords *komjet*, *konsert* [kɔnsɛr:t], etc. Surprisingly, however, the conditioning is identical to the one encountered in the *First Grammatical Treatise*, a phonology written by an anonymous 12th century Icelander. The grammarian gives minimal pairs for plain and nasalized vowels, a distinction that must have been lost soon after. Like in Elfdalian, vowels were nasalized before (and after) nasals.

Swedish	Elfdalian	FGT	Old Norse	PGm.
(skrovlig)	ram [rɔ̃m]	[rãmr]	rámr	*rēma-
(hopp)	uon [uɔ̃n]	[uõn]	vón > ván	*wēnō-
(mamma)	muna [mɔ̃na]	[mõna]	móna	*mōnōn-



5. Origins of the Elfdalian nasal vowels

2. Middle Scandinavian nasalization

The non-automatic nasal vowels in the endings cannot be explained from the synchronic context of Elfdalian phonology. They rather result from prehistoric (Middle Scandinavian) loss of final -n, usually to be identified with the Old Norse definite suffix -(i)n. This layer of nasalization is paralleled only by the Norwegian Selbu dialect of Sør-Trøndelag (see Røset 2011: 35-38), but must be reconstructed for the larger part of central Scandinavia.

Swedish	Elfdalian	Selbuvian	Middle Sca.	Old Norse
solen	suolę	solã	*sōĩ	sól-in
kyrkan	tjørtjå	kjørkjã	*kyrkjã	kyrkja-n
hon	å	hõ	*hõ, hã	hón / hán
nu	nų	nõ	*nũ	nú-na
(tak-et)	tatjĵ	takĩ	*pakĩ(?)	þaki-nu



5. Origins of the Elfdalian nasal vowels

3a. Proto-Norse nasalization by loss of *n* in stressed coda position

Short vowels were apocoped in Proto-Norse. Any resulting syllable-final nasals were lost in Proto-Norse, e.g. PGm. *ana > PN *an > ON á [ã]. Elfdalian and the Selbu dialect show traces of nasalization here.

Swedish	Elfdalian	Selbuv.	ON	PGm.	other
då	dǫ	dã	þá	*þan	G dann
(på)	ǫ	(på)	á	*ana	G an
o-	uɔ-	o-	ó- / ú-	*un-	G un-

The preposition *i* does not have any nasalization because it continues an unstressed form; stressed *ĩ would have become **ǫi.

Swedish	Elfd.	Selbuv.	ON	PGm.	other
i	i	i	í	*in	Go. in



5. Origins of the Elfdalian nasal vowels

3b. Proto-Norse nasalization in unstressed syllables

Proto-Norse nasality in final syllables is not preserved in Elfdalian but in a handful of exceptions. In the first two cases given in the table, the West Norse diphthongal shift of *-éã- and *-íã- to *-iǎ- created a (stressed) monosyllable, in which the nasalization was preserved. The third case was monosyllabic all along.

Swedish	Elfd.	Old Norse	PN	Gothic
se (< sēa)	sjǫ	séa > sjá	*sehwã	saihan
(tre)	triʝo (acc.)	þría > þrjá	*þrīans	(þrins)
två	tʝo (acc.)	tvá	*twans	twans

Note that, apart from the Runic inscriptions, *only Elfdalian* provides direct evidence for the existence of nasalized final vowels in Old Norse. Also, it proves that the loss of the nasality in these final vowels was posterior to the West Norse diphthongal shift (see 4.4).



5. Origins of the Elfdalian nasal vowels

3c. Nasal loss before s

Proto-Norse nasals were regularly lost before s, resulting in a preceding nasal vowel. The original nasal is often, but not always, confirmed by cognates in East or West Germanic.

Swedish	Elfd.	Old Norse	PGm.	other
ås	å̃s	áss	*amsa-	Go. ams
bås	bå̃s	báss	*bansa-	MDu. bans
gås	gå̃s	gáss, góss	*gans-	G Gans
lås	lå̃s	lás	*lamsa-	-
ister	į̃ster	ístr	*instra-	MHG inster
dial. fus/fos	fų̃os	fúss	*funsa-	OHG funs



5. Origins of the Elfdalian nasal vowels

3d. Before *r* and *l*

In Proto-Norse, an *n* was lost directly before liquids. The loss often followed syncope, i.e. the loss of a short vowel in middle syllables.

Swedish	Elfd.	Old Norse	PN	PGm.
tjur(-ved)	tiȝor	þinurr	*þinwra-	*þinwara-
torsdag	tiȝos-dag	þórs-dagr	*þunra-	*þunara-
vår	ȝor	órr (várr < óarr)	*unrra-	*unzara-
(man)	mól	(mōn)	*manla-	*manala-

The derivation of *tiȝor* 'reaction wood' is especially complicated. The diphthong -iuo- implies metathesis of *þinwra- to *þiunra-, but ON *þinurr* (Nw. *tinár*, -ur) does not have it. Possibly, the original paradigm *þinwaraz, dat. *þinwarai developed into late PN *þinwarr, þinwrē, the latter case giving *þiunrē. Note that one *cannot* derive *tiȝor* from PN *þinwra- by w-breaking (pace Bugge apud Noreen 1881: 193, fn. 7) as this type of breaking was absent in Elfdalian (see 4.5).



5. Origins of the Elfdalian nasal vowels

4. Proto-Germanic nasalization before *h*

In Proto-Norse nasals were lost before *s*. A similar process took place in Proto-Germanic, but this time before *h*. In some case, the Elfdalian material alone provides an indication for a PGm. nasal. It thus disproves some earlier PGm. reconstructions without this element.

Elfd.	Old Norse	PGm.	Etymology
gǫtt 'doorpost'	gátt	*ganhti-	Go. -gahts 'step'
kǫt 'lively'	kátr	*kanhta-	? Not *kawata-!
gǫ 'to check'	gá	*ga-anhēn-	Not *gawēn-!
gęta 'to guard'	gæta	*ga-anhatjan-	Not *gawatjan!
tǫt 'thread'	þáttr	*þanhtu-	Not *þēhtu-!

Note that *tǫt* < *þanhtu- is especially intriguing, as the implied Proto-Indo-European form *tonk-tu- (with nasal) may correspond to some Iranian evidence, viz. Wakhi *tanʒ-* 'to fortify the warp'.



5. Origins of the Elfdalian nasal vowels

5. Unexpected nasality

Not all nasal vowels are etymological in Elfdalian. Analogy with semantically close rhyme words explains some cases...

Swedish	Elfd.	Old Norse	PGm.	Analogy
foster	fȳoster	fóstr	*fōstra-	cf. mȳoster
torsdag	tȳosdag	þórsdagr	*þunara-	cf. ȳosdag?
fähus	fjå̃s	fjós	*fehu-hūsa-	cf. bå̃s?

...but not all:

Swedish	Elfd.	Old Norse	PGm.	Etymology
stål	stå̃l	stál	*sta(n)hla-	cf. OPru. staclan!
kål	kå̃l	kál	-	= OE cāl



5. Origins of the Elfdalian nasal vowels

5b. Parasitic nasals

Unetymological or "parasitic" (Steensland 2011) nasals are especially frequent in front of *s*.

Swedish	Elfd.	Old Norse	PGm.	Etymology
resa	rjesa	-	-	= LG rēsen
(löpmage)	kęse	kæsir	-	Lat. cāseus
hosta	ųosta	hósta	*hōstōn-	Go. hosta

According to Steensland, this has something to do with the regular pre-Elfdalian loss of *n* before *s*:

Swedish	Elfd.	Old Norse	PGm.	Etymology
ensam	jesum	-	-	= LG ēnsām
vänster	wjster	vinstri	*wenistra-	
rensa	rjesa	hreinsa	*hrainisōn-	



6. A new Elfdalian sound law?

1. Non-merger of old geminates and geminates from nasal + stop

Elfdalian appears to distinguish ON *-aCC-* < PGm. **-aCC-* from ON *-aCC-* < PGm. **-anC-* (by nasal assimilation), cf. *-aCC-* < PGm. **-aCC-*:

Swedish	Elfdalian	OW Norse	Proto-Gm.
nacke	nakke	hnakki	*hnakkan-
(by-)racka	rakke	rakki	*rakkan-
knapp	knapp	knappr	*knappa-

...versus *-oCC-* < **-anC-*:

Swedish	Elfdalian	OW Norse	Proto-Gm.
ankel	okkel	oqkull	*ankula-
backe	bokke	bakki	*bankan-
black	blokk	blakkr	*blanka-
tack	tokk	þoqk	*þankō-



6. A new Elfdalian sound law?

2. The preterite of the strong verbs

The sound change can also be observed in the preterite of some strong verbs, where it destroyed the regular i/a-ablaut:

Swedish	Elfdalian	OW Norse	Proto-Norse
binda → band	binda → bott	binda → batt	*bindǣ → *bant
dricka → drack	drikka → drokk	drekka → drakk	*drinkǣ → *drank
sjunka → sjönk	sikka → sokk	søkkva → sōkk	*sinkwǣ → *sankw

Compare for the expected a-vocalism in the preterite:

Swedish	Elfdalian	OW Norse	Proto-Norse
rinna → rann	rinna → rann	renna → rann	*rinnǣ → *rann



6. A new Elfdalian sound law?

3. The imperative of the verb *gå* 'to go'

Further evidence for the law is found in the Elfd. imperative *gokk!* 'go!'.

Swedish	Elfdalian	OW Norse	Proto-Norse
<i>gå</i> → <i>gå!</i>	<i>gå</i> → <i>gokk!</i>	<i>ganga</i> → <i>gakk!</i>	* <i>gangǣ</i> → * <i>gank!</i>

The verb is interesting in view of its suppletion. The imperative *gokk* together with the preterite *djikk* belonged to the verb attested as OWN *ganga*. The infinitive, on the other hand, goes back to a verb *gá* as attested in Old Swedish (cf. modern Scandinavian *gå*), and probably continues PGm. **gēn-*. The absence of a nasal vowel in Elfdalian is difficult to explain, but the Selbu dialect does have nasalization in *gǣ* 'to go' (Røset 2011: 114).



6. A new Elfdalian sound law?

4. Phonetic interpretation

Although the nasal is completely lost in Elfdalian after the assimilation by the following consonant, it seems logical to assume that the preceding vowel was first nasalized before it was rounded. Subsequently, the phonetic length of the nasal was absorbed by following stop (not by the vowel).

Proto-Gm.	"Proto-Dalec."	"Old Dalec."	Elfdalian
*ankulaz	*ãkkulR	*okkul	okkel

Conclusion: since the rounding before assimilated nasals is specifically a Elfdalian development, the predecessor of the language must have started diverging from the other Scandinavian dialects during the earliest stage of Old Norse.



7. Conclusions

- 1. Is the treatment of the nasals by Elfdalian of relevance to the reconstruction of Proto-Germanic?** Yes, it backs up existing reconstructions at many occasions, and in some cases, it provides unique linguistic evidence.
- 2. What is the dialectal position of Elfdalian within the Scandinavian continuum?** In many aspects, Elfdalian, takes up a middle position between East and West Nordic. However, it shares *some* innovations with West Nordic, but *none* with East Nordic. This invalidates the claim that Elfdalian split off from Old Swedish.
- 3. How “old” is Elfdalian?** It has been claimed that Dalecarlian evolved out of Old Swedish between the 11th (Sapir 2005) and the 14th century (Levander 1925). However, the rounding of *a* in front of *kk, *pp and *tt < *-nC- seems to imply that (Proto-)Dalecarlian already had a dynamic of its own in the early Old Norse period.



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